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In sum, *Animal Motifs in Asian Art* offers a compendium of images and information and provides a useful source for researchers seeking cultural and philosophical "leads" with representations of animal life in traditional and current Asian literature and visual art. While the prose style may seem somewhat ornate and sometimes precious today, and while there are occasional disconcerting ethnic remarks (vii), the collection of so much information in a single volume remains highly useful. Oldies can indeed remain goodies.

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The Tale of Bluebeard in German Literature: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present. *By Mererid Puw Davies. Oxford: Clarendon P, 2001. ix + 279 pp.*

The Tale of Bluebeard, as Mererid Puw Davies writes in her preface, is the first full-length study "devoted to the history of 'Blaubart' in German literature" (vii). Since tales such as "Bluebeard" may signify "some of our most essential narratives about ourselves," an exploration of this literary tradition is intended to provide "keys for an understanding of culture and the history that formed it." In this particular context, "keys for an understanding" serves as a cue- or clue-phrase, aligning the critic (and her readers) with the inquisitive heroine whose transgressive search for knowledge, for secrets beyond a forbidden door, ultimately leads to her salvation. Indeed, as specified in the preface, "With its focus on a relationship between a woman and a man, 'Blaubart' has consistently been a seismograph of gender politics, and it is on that theme which this study will focus most extensively" (vii). Davies thus introduces her subject matter with immediate clarity, and despite the great quantity of primary and secondary materials dealt with in this book, it is distinguished from beginning to end by its intelligibility and organization.

A brief outline of the content of the eight chapters will give readers a sense of the scope of Davies's study of the Bluebeard tale in German thought and culture; however, it will necessarily leave out the close attention to textual details that accompanies her historical overview. Drawing on previous scholarship of the märchen genre, chapter 1 demonstrates not only that notions about the timelessness and purely oral origins of the genre are constructed conventions, "enthusiastically taken up in the interests of a German Romantic Nationalism," but also that the stories constantly assume new literary shapes and express significant contemporaneous ideas (4). In this chapter Davies also takes a crucial step for her rereading of Perrault's "La Barbe bleue" (1697) as a utopian, proto-feminist narrative—a rereading central to the argument of her book—and, citing Kay Stone's sensible observation that "the feminist view of [fairy-tale] heroines has itself become a stereotype," she proposes a reexamination of such hackneyed perceptions of the genre. Some tales, after all, may be used "to

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transmit more complex and subversive messages than meet the eye" (13). Chapter 2 presents the principal thesis to be sustained throughout the book: "far from being a tale about feminine subjection and suffering, 'Bluebeard' is a tale about a woman who flouts patriarchal authority, acquires knowledge in the face of terrifying adversity, and . . . is rewarded for it" (41). I shall return to this portrayal of Perrault's text as a "literature of subversion *par excellence*" (56) at the conclusion of my discussion. Chapter 3 analyzes various expositions of the origin of the Bluebeard story in history, mythology, social practice, and psychology. What is truly remarkable, as Davies cogently argues, is this singular tale's elasticity, which allows it to accommodate so much and to stretch so far, thereby revealing "less about its putative past meanings than about . . . the way it reflects contemporary ideas about marriage, *Märchen,* and civilization" (93). Precisely, and such a statement also suggests that no interpretation can stand outside the tradition of interpretation it describes but rather is unavoidably or "always already" implicated in it.

Chapter 4, one of the finest in this impressively informative monograph, provides a thorough comparative analysis of early versions of "Bluebeard" in German. This chapter exemplifies the merits of what may be called post–New Criticism—that is, it successfully combines a close reading of specific texts, such as Friedrich Bertuch's and August Lewald's translations of "La Barbe bleue" and the Grimms' 1812 version of the French *conte,* with considerations of intertexuality and sociohistorical contexts. The following three chapters address different retellings of the tale at different periods in German history and show how "Bluebeard" functions as a kind of cultural barometer, registering changes in gender politics, perceptions of national identity, and other processes of civilization. Chapter 8 offers a summary of the materials discussed and draws conclusions about the ways that, for more than three hundred years, an astonishing variety of "Bluebeard" texts have borne the telltale imprint of where they are coming from and what they have seen.

In chapter 7, "Bluebeard in the Later Twentieth Century," for example, Davies examines a group of texts written by women who, with varying degrees of explicitness, address two major issues in recent German history. First, the murderous figure of Bluebeard is associated with the legacy of National Socialism and the Holocaust, symbolically linking bloody chambers with gas chambers and the forbidden, encrypted spaces of memory. In these narratives, as Davies shows, the attempted annihilation of the Other as Woman in the tale of Bluebeard is coherently and chillingly connected to the genocidal policies of the Nazis. Second, and relatedly, women writers have also used Bluebeard materials to represent, explore, and criticize the consequences of that dark history, namely, the division of Germany after 1945 (with Bluebeard as paradigm and symbol, evoking the brutal authoritarianism of the GDR) and its reunifica-

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tion after 1989. As opposed to the still-frequent association of women and women's writing with the private or homebound sphere, Davies describes how writers such as Ingeborg Bachmann, Karin Struck, and Unica Zürn have deployed the *Blaubartmärchen* in order to link individual and collective trauma, medical discourses, the Holocaust, second-generation memory, the abuse of children, and other publicly fraught issues. She thereby extends the investigation begun in her earlier essay, "In *Blaubarts Schatten:* Murder, *Märchen* and Memory" (*German Life and Letters* 50 [1997]: 491–507), in new and significant directions. In placing "Bluebeard" firmly in its time-bound contexts, Davies's study takes part in the critical process of the demystification of fairy tales (as in the scholarly work of Cristina Bacchilega, Ruth Bottigheimer, Maria Tatar, Jack Zipes, and others) as an ageless ideal, somehow above or "superior" to history and its vicissitudes.

Having said that, I would nonetheless propose two reservations, one mainly technical and the other substantive. First, in leaving all German and French texts in the original languages, without translation in tandem or in footnotes, Davies dramatically limits her readership. This decision is regrettable because Davies's clear-sighted and detailed interpretations of German inflections of the Bluebeard tale constitute an important contribution of her study to the literary tradition it explores. Second, as noted previously, Davies offers a resolutely positive reading of the gender politics of Perrault's version as "a vehicle of subversive utopianism" (14). Such a reading, however, leads to some tight hermeneutic corners. For example: "[Perrault's] *conte* is far from reflecting a man's world in which women have no autonomy or agency. Specifically, the bride's family is headed . . . by a mother who gives her daughters a large degree of freedom, and so the daughter's decision to marry Bluebeard is her own" (44). But this "pro-feminist" feature may be easily reversed and its implications read otherwise. For example: look at what happens when women, rather than men, rule the family, and daughters are foolishly given the freedom to choose their mates and the opportunity to indulge their insatiable curiosity. Very often they lose their heads! The conservative moral codas appended to the tale reinforce this warning message; as Davies herself observes, "the *moralité* implies that the text cautions against curiosity" (45). How, then, is the tale's purported flouting of patriarchal authority to be upheld? Davies claims that Perrault, sensing the "explosive potential" of his transgressive tale in which the heroine (unlike Eve in the biblical narrative) is richly rewarded, "attempted to re-stabilize the text by adding such conventional and less pro-feminist *moralités* to it" (45). Yet again, it is difficult to reconcile the autonomous, emancipated female subjectivity repeatedly adduced by Davies with Perrault's emphasis on a woman governed by her emotions: impatience and curiosity. Forgetting civility, she neglects her guests, is impelled—or even "compelled," as Davies writes (51)—to open the prohibited

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door, and altogether unable to overcome temptation. Compulsion and autonomy are challenging, if not impossible, concepts to yoke together.

Holding up Perrault's tale as a potential standard of "utopianism and challenge to traditional, patriarchal gender roles" (245), a model against which later retellings are measured, also requires playing down three narrative givens. First, contra the "subversive implication of the woman's getting away with it without being harshly punished" is the fact that only *one* gets away and all the others are violently lost (96). Second, as Marc Soriano points out in *Les Contes de Perrault: Culture savante et traditions populaires,* in contrast to folk "Bluebeard" versions, Perrault eliminates the heroine's recourse to magical animal helpers who bring a message to her parents or brothers; instead, his version dramatizes her tearful passivity and makes her rescue depend on *hasard,* the fortuitous arrival of her brothers who just happened to plan a visit that day. Third, although Bluebeard is indeed overthrown at the end, the lucky wife remains firmly enclosed within the symbolic paternal order: not only is she transferred from the keeping of one husband to a supposedly more benign lord and master, but she also enables this transfer of her person (including her newly acquired fortune) herself—a sign of provisional agency as well as of permanent collusion with the law of the fathers. No sooner does Perrault's heroine gain independence, wealth, and power than she gives it back to a male (be)holder.

It is arguably therefore not the tale itself that is utopian but rather the critic's reading of it, expressing a wish (which I and, if I may presume, many of her readers share) for a fairy tale of emancipation, for a narrative that bodes better for women than it does in actual design. Davies would save a text-in-distress from the critique of its feminist readers, a rescue effort that repeats at the metacritical level the timely intervention of the brothers in Perrault's tale. These recuperative strategies are compelling and exemplify, to borrow a phrase from Harold Bloom's poetics, a strong misreading of a very scary story.

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Language and Gender in the Fairy Tale Tradition: A Linguistic Analysis of Old and New Story Telling. *By Alessandra Levorato. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. 230 pp.*

In *Language and Gender in the Fairy Tale Tradition,* Alessandra Levorato utilizes a linguistic approach to analyze the ideologies at work in fairy tales, namely "Little Red Riding Hood" (AT 333). Levorato examines both traditional and radical versions of the tale in the light of how ideologies are embedded in texts at various levels and thus produce meaning. Her book is a refreshing examination of how linguistic and formal qualities of fairy tales are not only

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